

# MAUI PARROTBILL

*(Pseudonestor xanthophrys)*

**DISTRIBUTION:** The Maui Parrotbill dwells in the upper koa-‘ōhi‘a rainforest of East Maui between approximately 4,300 and 7,000 feet elevation. Its range extends over eight miles, covering an area less than 5,000 acres from the upper Waikamoi watershed southeast to upper Kipahulu Valley.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Maui Parrotbill is 5.5 inches long with a short tail and a large, hooked parrot-like bill. It is olive-green above with a yellow throat, breast and abdomen, and a prominent yellow stripe over the eye.

**VOICE:** There are three different call notes: a loud rising whistle, “kee-wit,” a “chick,” and a descending broken note, “tchew.” The two melodious warbling songs descend in scale.

**NESTING:** Breeding biology is unknown, but courtship feeding has been seen in August, and young have been observed in March, June, and September.

**DIET:** Maui Parrotbills use their powerful bills to bite open fruit and remove insects and to split dry branches and pry beetle larvae from deadwood. They also eat the larvae and pupae of small moths.



## CONSERVATION NOTE:

The population of the endangered Maui Parrotbill is estimated to be approximately 500 birds. Historic records from the turn of the century indicate that the Parrotbill formerly occupied dry koa forests on the northwest slopes of Haleakalā. Subfossil evidence also suggests they once inhabited dry lowland habitat on Maui and Mōlokaʻi.

By the end of the nineteenth century most of the koa forest habitat of the Parrotbill had been cut for timber or cleared for agriculture and cattle pasture. The Parrotbill’s population dropped as its range became restricted to less-preferred wet ‘ōhi‘a forests. And its population has continued to decline due to a number of disturbances which still plague the native forests today.

Parrotbills forage for food in the subcanopy trees and understory plants of the forest. These plants are particularly sensitive to destruction by feral pigs. The rooting of pigs creates disturbed areas where introduced plants can take hold and disease-transmitting mosquitoes can breed. One of the goals of the recovery plan for the Maui Parrotbill is to remove feral goats, pigs, cattle, and axis deer from essential habitat. Further research is also needed to better understand the reasons for the Parrotbill’s decline. These combined efforts are essential to ensure the survival of these unique native birds.

The rare Maui Parrotbill — Photo by Eric Nishibayashi